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ACTION SCT-03

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-17	ACDE-00	AID-01	ARA-01	A-01	CA-02
	CCO-00	CG-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	COME-00	CTME-00	OASY-00
	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DOTE-00	DS-00	EB-01	FAAE-00	FBIE-00
	FBO-01	H-01	IMMC-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	INSE-00	JUSE-00
	LAB-01	L-01	ADS-00	M-00	NEA-01	NRCE-00	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OCS-06	OIS-01	OMB-01	OPR-01	PA-01	PM-00
	PRS-01	P-01	SNP-00	SP-00	SR-00	SS-00	TRSE-00
	T-00	USIE-00	USSS-00	ASDS-01	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-09
	G-00	/054W					

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1038
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM//SCCC//
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

RELEASED IN FULL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 004711

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, PTER, ASEC, AR
SUBJECT: BOMBING OF JEWISH WELFARE ORGANIZATION IN
- BUENOS AIRES

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REF: A) BUENOS AIRES 4685; B) BUENOS AIRES 4694

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT

SUMMARY

2. THE DEATH TOLL IN THE JULY 18 TERRORIST BOMBING
OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE JEWISH WELFARE ORGANIZATION
AMIA (ISRAELI-ARGENTINE MUTUAL ASSOCIATION) CONTINUES
TO RISE AS RESCUE SQUADS SEARCH FOR BODIES IN THE

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RUINS OF THE COMPLETELY COLLAPSED SEVEN-STORY AMIA BUILDING. THE NUMBER OF DEAD AND INJURED WILL PROBABLY FAR EXCEED THE TOLL IN THE MARCH 1992 BOMBING OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY HERE. AUTHORITIES ESTIMATE THAT THERE WERE BETWEEN 80 AND 100 PEOPLE IN THE BUILDING WHEN WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A VERY POWERFUL SHAPE CHARGE IN A PARKED CAR WAS DETONATED AT 9:55 AM BUENOS AIRES TIME ON MONDAY MORNING.

3. SOME OCCUPANTS OF THE BUILDING SURVIVED THE BLAST, BUT THERE IS LITTLE HOPE FOR THOSE WHO REMAIN BURIED UNDER THE RUBBLE OF THE COLLAPSED BUILDING. LOCAL HOSPITALS REPORT RECEIVING NUMEROUS WOUNDED. THE DAMAGE TO OTHER BUILDINGS ADJACENT TO AND ACROSS THE NARROW DOWNTOWN STREET FROM THE AMIA BUILDING WAS EXTENSIVE, AND SOME OF THE WOUNDED WERE TAKEN FROM THOSE EDIFICES IN THE LARGELY BUSINESS/COMMERCIAL SECTION OF BUENOS AIRES TRADITIONAL JEWISH NEIGHBORHOOD "ONCE." SO FAR NO AMERICAN CITIZENS HAVE BEEN REPORTED INJURED BY THE BOMBING, BUT A U.S.

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MILITARY STUDENT'S APARTMENT ONE-HALF BLOCK FROM THE SITE WAS RENDERED UNINHABITABLE BY THE BLAST. AN ORGANIZATION CALLING ITSELF THE "ISLAMIC COMMAND" CALLED IN A MESSAGE TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ATTACK TO A LOCAL RADIO STATION, BUT EMBASSY AND GOA SOURCES DO NOT PLACE MUCH CREDIT IN THE ANNOUNCEMENT. AS A PRELIMINARY MEASURE, THE GOA HAS ORDERED ALL LAND AND SEA BORDERS CLOSED AND SUSPENDED TEMPORARILY OUTGOING INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS. THE DEATH AND INJURY TOLL FROM THE LATEST ANTI-SEMITIC ATTACK ON THE THIRD LARGEST JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE WORLD OUTSIDE ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES MAY EXCEED THAT OF THE MARCH 17, 1992 BOMBING OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY IN BUENOS AIRES, IN WHICH 30 PEOPLE PERISHED. AT FIRST BLUSH THE MODUS OPERANDI OF THE TWO ATTACKS APPEAR VERY SIMILAR. THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE BOMBING IS, AT THIS POINT, DIFFICULT TO GAUGE, BUT DOUBTLESS MANY ARGENTINES WILL HOLD THE MENEM GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE FOR NEGLIGENCE IN PROTECTING ARGENTINA'S LARGE, INFLUENTIAL JEWISH COMMUNITY. END SUMMARY.

A DAY OF MOURNING

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4. THE JULY 18 ATTACK ON THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE JEWISH BENEVOLENT ORGANIZATION KNOWN AS AMIA CAME THE DAY AFTER TWO DAYS OF MOURNING AND REFLECTION COMMEMORATING THE DESTRUCTION OF THE HIGH TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM, A PERIOD SIMILAR TO ALL SAINTS AND ALL SOULS DAY IN CHRISTIAN LITURGY. THE SEVEN-STORY AMIA BUILDING AT 630 PASTEUR STREET IN BUENOS AIRES' JEWISH

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QUARTER HOUSED THE OFFICES OF DAIA (DELEGACION DE ASOCIACIONES ISRAELIES-ARGENTINA) AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION GROUPING TOGETHER MOST OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY'S SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. THE AMIA BUILDING ALSO HOUSED A PRIMARY SCHOOL (WHICH FORTUNATELY WAS RECESSED FOR WINTER VACATIONS); MEDICAL OFFICES, THE OFFICES OF SEVERAL JEWISH EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND A MARRIAGE AGENCY. NORMALLY SOME 700 PEOPLE WORK IN OR VISIT THE AMIA BUILDING ON A GIVEN DAY. THE FACT THAT THE ATTACK OCCURRED BEFORE 10 AM, BEFORE ALL OF AMIA'S ORGANIZATIONS WERE FULLY OPERATIONAL, MAY HAVE SAVED MANY LIVES.

5. ACCORDING TO INFORMATION FROM THE STATE SECRETARIAT OF INFORMATION (SIDE) THE BLAST ORIGINATED FROM A RENAULT AUTOMOBILE ILLEGALLY PARKED IN FRONT OF THE AMIA BUILDING. UNLIKE THE MARCH 1992 ATTACK ON THE ISRAELI EMBASSY, WHICH WAS A SUICIDE OPERATION, THE DRIVER OF THE RENAULT APPEARS TO HAVE ESCAPED BEFORE THE BLAST WAS DETONATED. THE CHARGE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN "AIMED" AT THE AMIA BUILDING, SINCE THE DAMAGE SUFFERED BY ADJACENT STRUCTURES AND THE BUILDINGS ACROSS THE STREET -- WHILE EXTENSIVE -- WAS CONSIDERABLY LESS THAN THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF THE

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	PRS-01	P-01	SNP-00	SP-00	SR-00	SS-00	TRSE-00
	T-00	USIE-00	USSS-00	ASDS-01	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-09
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AMIA BUILDING. A POLICE PATROL CAR ALSO PARKED IN
FRONT OF THE BUILDING WAS SERIOUSLY DAMAGED BY THE
BLAST, BUT THERE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN NO ONE IN THE
VEHICLE AT THE TIME. THE AMIA BUILDING HAS BEEN THE
OBJECT OF 24-HOUR POLICE PROTECTION SINCE THE EMBASSY
ATTACK, AND STRICT INTERNAL SECURITY MEASURES WERE IN
PLACE.

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6. AT THE SCENE OF THE ATTACK POLICE AND FIRE RESCUE CREWS, AIDED BY HUNDREDS OF VOLUNTEERS AND HINDERED SOMEWHAT BY SCORES OF INTRUSIVE JOURNALISTS, CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR BODIES AMONG THE RUINS. GAS AND ELECTRICAL SERVICES TO THE ZONE WERE SHUT OFF, FOR FEAR OF PROVOKING A SECONDARY EXPLOSION. AN EMERGENCY COMMAND CENTER FOR OPERATIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS WAS SET UP AT A NEAR BY FACILITY BELONGING TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. EARLY MEDIA SPECULATION THAT THE BLAST MIGHT HAVE BEEN DUE TO A GAS LEAK HAVE BEEN DISCOUNTED. EMBASSY CONTACTS WITHIN ARGENTINA'S LARGE, INFLUENTIAL JEWISH COMMUNITY ARE STUNNED AND IMMEASURABLY SADDENED BY THIS SECOND ATTACK ON THE VISIBLE SYMBOLS OF THEIR PRESENCE HERE.

REACTION

7. PRESIDENT MENEM ORDERED DEFENSE MINISTER CAMILION TO SEAL OFF IMMEDIATELY ALL OF ARGENTINA'S BORDERS AND ALSO ORDERED THE RETURN OF ALL HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS FROM ABROAD, PRIMARILY INTERIOR MINISTER RUCKAUF, WHO WAS IN NEW YORK. WE UNDERSTAND FROM
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CIVIL AVIATION SOURCES THAT THE PREFECTURA NAVAL (COAST GUARD) HAS SEALED OFF ALL MARITIME EXITS FROM THE COUNTRY, AND THAT ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS FROM EZEIZA AND AEROPARQUE AIRPORTS HAVE BEEN PREVENTED FROM DEPARTING FOR THE TIME BEING. THE HEAD OF THE LOCAL ISLAMIC CENTER AND THE PLO OFFICE IN ARGENTINA REPORTEDLY HAVE CONDEMNED THE ATTACK. PRESIDENT MENEM EXPRESSED, THROUGH FOREIGN MINISTER DI TELLA, HIS SYMPATHIES TO THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT. ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER PERES, INTERVIEWED BY PHONE, SAID THAT THE GOA HAS ACCEPTED TEL AVIV'S OFFER OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE ON-GOING INVESTIGATION INTO THE INDICENT. AS OF 17:00 LOCAL TIME PRESIDENT MENEM HAD MADE NO PUBLIC STATEMENT ABOUT THE BOMBING.

EMBASSY MEASURES

8. CHARGE CALLED DAIA PRESIDENT RUBEN BERAJA AND THE ISRAELI CHARGE TO EXTEND HIS CONDOLENCES. HE ALSO SPOKE TO VICE FOREIGN MINISTER FERNANDO PETRELLA,

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EXPRESSING THE USG'S SHOCK AT THE ATTACK ON AMIA, AND OFFERING TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN THE FURTHER RESCUE OF VICTIMS AND IN THE SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATION OF THE CRIME. PETRELLA WAS VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE EXPRESSION OF U.S. CONCERN AND AGREED TO GET BACK TO US. THROUGH OTHER CHANNELS THE EMBASSY IS TOUCHING BASE WITH THE FEDERAL POLICE AND THE INTERIOR MINISTRY TO SEE WHAT SPECIFIC KINDS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WE MIGHT PROVIDE. THE EMBASSY EMERGENCY ACTION COMMITTEE MET AT NOON JULY 18 TO REVIEW INFORMATION AND COORDINATE

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EFFORTS TO HEIGHTEN SECURITY AND MAKE AMCITS IN ARGENTINA AWARE OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

9. IT IS FAR TOO EARLY TO SPECULATE ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL FALLOUT OF THE ATTACK ON THE AMIA BUILDING. OUR CONTACTS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ARE STILL STUNNED, BUT SOON THEIR SHOCK WILL GIVE WAY TO ANGER. WE SUSPECT THAT THE MENEM GOVERNMENT, WHICH AFTER MORE THAN TWO YEARS HAS BEEN UNABLE TO DEVELOP CREDIBLE LEADS TO THE PERPETRATORS OF THE MARCH 1992 EMBASSY BOMBING, AND WHICH NOW HAS PROVEN ITSELF TOTALLY INEFFECTIVE IN PROTECTING THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT SYMBOL OF THE JEWISH PRESENCE IN ARGENTINA, WILL SUFFER THE BRUNT OF THIS ANGER AND CRITICISM.

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